

Character Class

Favored Souls with Class

By Skip Williams



This column aims to provide players with tips on creating effective and interesting characters of various types. So whether you're a beginning player creating your very first character or an experienced gamer looking to put some punch into an old standby, this column is for you!

The Pros and Cons of a Favored Soul

Some favored souls allow their link with the divine to define their personalities. Such a character may become such a fervent devotee of her deity that she tries to emulate her patron in every way and concerns herself with little else. But a favored soul doesn't have to become some deity's sycophant. Her relationship with the divine can remain a largely private affair, with the deity's influence adding a hint of depth and color to her personality. Whatever her outlook, a favored soul has access to divine magic that can prove a boon to any adventuring party.



Favored Soul Assets

The favored soul has access to divine spells that can heal, fortify, or protect her and her allies, as well as many spells that can directly help to defeat her foes. You can turn your favored soul into a street preacher, a holy hermit, a righteous healer, or any other archetype with a hint of the divine. Below are several assets you have going for you when you choose a favored soul.

- **Good Fortitude, Reflex, and Will Saves:** A favored soul uses the best save progression in the game for all saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This natural mental and physical resilience helps her resist most hazards and magical assaults. She can withstand effects that fool her mind, assault her spirit, or attack her body, including charms, compulsions, illusions, fear, polymorphing, poisons, and even disintegration. She is also adept at avoiding effects that fill entire areas, such as *lightning bolt* spells or dragons' breath weapons. Few other characters enjoy such comprehensive defenses against the hazards of the adventuring life.
- **Divine Spells:** The favored soul has access to the cleric spell list, which includes the various *cure* spells and other healing magic, as well as a broad array of attack, defensive, and utilitarian spells.
- **Spontaneous Spellcasting:** A favored soul doesn't have a spellbook; instead, she chooses a personal repertoire of spells that she can cast anytime. She does have a daily limit on the number of spells of each level she can cast, but she can freely cast any spell she knows until she reaches that limit. So she doesn't have to guess ahead of time which spells to prepare -- if she needs to cast a particular spell several times in the same day, she can do so.

- **Good Armor Class:** A favored soul has access to defensive spells that improve her Armor Class (such as *shield of faith, protection from evil, and magic vestment*). These spells, combined with the fact that she can wear any kind of armor and use any kind of shield (except a tower shield), usually give the favored soul quite an impressive Armor Class.
- **Good Hit Points:** The favored soul's 8-sided Hit Dice give her a fairly robust hit point total. Her high hit points and good Armor Class usually allow her to hold her own in combat.
- **Good Attack Bonus:** A favored soul's base attack bonus -- +3 per four levels -- is second only to that of the more martial classes, such as the fighter. So if your favored soul decides to enter combat, she can make a pretty good showing.
- **Winning Ways:** A favored soul needs to have a high Charisma score because that ability governs her spellcasting. But a high Charisma score also helps her reason or bargain with potential foes as an alternative to fighting them.
- **Fair Weapon Selection:** The favored soul is proficient only with simple weaponry. Though simple weapons aren't the most deadly ones available, the fact that the favored soul has access to the whole category gives her plenty of options should her spells fail her. In addition, a favored soul is proficient with whichever weapon her deity favors -- and many deities, particularly the more warlike ones, favor martial weapons.
- **Excellence with the Deity's Favored Weapon:** At 3rd level, a favored soul gains the Weapon Focus feat with her deity's favored weapon. At 12th level, she gains the Weapon Specialization feat with that weapon.
- **Energy Resistance:** At 5th level, a favored soul gains energy resistance 10 against one energy type. She gains energy resistance 10 against a second energy type at 10th level, and energy resistance 10 against a third type at 15th level. The favored soul chooses the energy type resisted at each of these points.
- **Wings:** At 17th level, a favored soul sprouts wings and gains a fly speed of 60 feet, with good maneuverability. Flight can cause a problem for favored souls who rely on lots of armor, since they can't fly while carrying a medium or heavy load or while wearing medium or heavy armor. All things considered, however, that problem isn't a bad one to have.
- **Damage Reduction:** At 20th level, a favored soul gains damage reduction 10/silver or 10/cold iron, depending on her alignment. (See the favored soul class description for details.)

Favored Soul Weaknesses

As with any class in the D&D game, the favored soul's advantages come at a price. Below are a few of the disadvantages you should keep in mind if you're considering a favored soul character.

- **Low Skill Points:** At a mere two skill points per level, most favored souls don't accumulate many skill ranks, even with quadruple skill points at 1st level.
- **Low Mobility:** A favored soul's reliance on heavy armor makes her a slow mover on the battlefield.
- **Limited Spell Choices:** Once a favored soul chooses spells, her selection remains more or less fixed, except for new additions as she attains higher levels. She has a limited ability to change her repertoire, but for the most part, she is stuck with whatever spells she has chosen.

Playing a Classy Favored Soul

Great favored souls usually use the following techniques, so if you're playing one, try to build your strategy around these concepts.

Have a Plan When You Choose Spells

You can learn very few spells at each level, so choose them carefully. As a divine spellcaster with access to healing spells, you'll naturally be under some pressure to become the party healer -- and if that's what you want to be, just go with the flow. But healing isn't the only route available to you. If you wish, you can build a spell repertoire focused primarily on attack spells such as *summon monster*, *hold person*, *sound burst*, *searing light*, and *inflict wounds*. You could also build a repertoire that maximizes your abilities in physical combat via spells such as *divine favor*, *shield of faith*, *align weapon*, *magic vestment*, and *divine power*. Many other themes for your spell repertoire are possible as well, and you might even wish to combine themes to focus on related concepts, such as attacks and physical combat.

Don't get too carried away with a theme for your spells, however, because a one-dimensional spell selection may leave you unable to handle more than one kind of challenge. To widen your focus, you might try incorporating a secondary theme into your repertoire, such as attack spells paired with a few combat enhancements. No matter how you build your spell list, it's fine to sprinkle in a little healing. In fact, doing so might prove essential, especially if you're the lone divine spellcaster in your group.

Remember Your Friends

Like most characters, you can accomplish more (and survive longer) by working with your allies. The role you can play in a party depends on the spells you know, but the entries below describe some ways in which you might be able to work with your companions.

The Party's Main Fighter: The character who stands front line and handles most of the fighting is likely to look to you for healing and other cures. If healing isn't in your repertoire, make sure your party's fighting characters realize that they must find some other way to recover lost hit points. Keep in mind, however, that a *cure light wounds* or *cure moderate wounds* spell can keep a fighting character going, thereby dealing more damage to the enemy than any other spell can.

If your spell selection leans toward combat, be ready to work with the main fighter in battle. The two of you can team up to defeat powerful foes, or simply watch each other's backs. If your spells include combat enhancements such as *bull's strength*, consider casting it on your fighting companion.

The Party Scout: Stealthy characters such as rogues, rangers, and monks often get in over their heads, so plan to be part of the rescue party when necessary. If you're a healer, you can piece the scout back together after a mishap. If you're a fighting type, look for opportunities to flank opponents so that the stealthy character's sneak attacks can come into play.

If you favor attack spells, use them with great care. The party scout can pop up unexpectedly almost anywhere, and you wouldn't want to blast your stealthy ally with errant spells.

Other Spellcasters: You probably have more hit points and a better Armor Class than the other spellcasters in your group, so try to stay close enough to them to offer some protection if a foe breaks through the front line.

Spellcasters usually do best when they take time to coordinate their spells, and you're no exception. You probably have a smaller selection of spells available to you on any given day than the other spellcasters in your group, so try to make your fellow spellcasters aware of what you have so that they can make selections to cover the gaps in your capabilities. If your personal repertoire is primarily offensive, however, don't expect other spellcasters to let you have all the fun blasting the opposition. Instead, work out ways to coordinate your attack spells. Perhaps you and another spellcaster can work together to blanket the opposition with area spells, or perhaps one of you can use area spells while another uses targeted spells to take out the enemy leaders or pick off cripples.

Some Key Equipment

Your gear is nearly as important to you as your spells, so don't neglect it. Here's a brief rundown on the essentials.

- **Armor:** You'll probably fight often, so plan to buy the best armor you can afford and carry a heavy shield as well -- unless your deity's favored weapon is two-handed. And don't overlook other defensive items you can wear, such as *rings of protection* and *amulets of natural armor*. Keep in mind that several lesser items whose benefits stack give you better protection, and at a cheaper price, than one big item.

If you do a lot of wilderness adventuring, consider some backup armor, such as a suit of studded leather (or a mithral chain shirt if you can afford it) to wear at night. If you try to sleep in heavy armor, you'll have penalties the next day. But if you sleep in your skivvies, you'll be in trouble if you're attacked in the night. Sleeping in light armor gives you some protection against nocturnal attacks without causing any ill effects the next day. Some light backup armor will also help you take advantage of your wings when you get them.

- **Melee Weapon:** You're pretty good in combat, so be prepared to fight. You fight best with your deity's favored weapon, so plan to use that most of the time. If you don't want to use your deity's weapon for some reason, consider a heavy mace or morningstar, both of which are one-handed simple weapons that deal good damage.
- **Ranged Weapon:** A light crossbow can prove as effective as a low-level attack spell against some opponents. Use it when the opposition isn't threatening enough to merit the use of your spells. You might also consider a heavy crossbow -- a deadly weapon, even though reloading it is a slow process. That reload time might not bother you too much, though, because you might find that casting a spell or entering melee is more worthwhile than taking a second shot.
- **Backup Spells:** You never know when you'll run out of spells. Furthermore, you never know when you'll need a particular spell -- and need it very badly. So it pays to keep some spellcasting power in reserve via a collection of scrolls, wands, or both. Scrolls are a great way to carry along useful spells (such as *remove blindness/deafness*, *dispel magic*, or *remove disease*) that you might not use in every adventure. Best of all, if you have the Scribe Scroll feat, you can make scrolls yourself, though doing so uses up time, money, and experience points. Wands are useful for bread-and-butter spells that you use often, especially healing spells such as *cure light wounds*. Furthermore, both scrolls and wands are a great way to expand your spell selection beyond your personal repertoire. If a spell is on the cleric class spell list, you can use it from a scroll or wand even if you don't know how to cast it yourself.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies, and he served as the Sage of Dragon Magazine for eighteen years. Skip is a co-designer of the D&D 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his

kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not his friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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